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Soviet turncoat details double-spy role in U.S.

Washington—The FBI brought a top-ranking, turncoat Soviet spy before an extraordinary news conference yesterday to describe how he had reported American political trends to the Soviet Union while posing for 11 years as a free-lance photographer in the New York area.

For one hour he sat on a stage behind a glass screen through which only his profile could be seen, answering questions in a heavy eastern-European accent and in often-ungrammatical English. The FBI said his voice was modulated electronically to disguise the accent.

The spy, whom FBI officials said they apprehended and persuaded to cooperate with U.S. authorities "some years ago," was identified only by the cover name he used here, Rudolph Albert Herrmann. He was identified as a colonel in the Soviet KGB intelligence apparatus.

Colonel Herrmann said his mission was political, not military. Among the activities he described were an unsuccessful effort to abort a manned U.S. space shot, efforts to get close to American presidential candidates and setting up and servicing of "dead drops," locations at which spies leave money, information, instructions or equipment for other spies to pick up.

He said his tasks also included taking charge of the Soviet espionage network in the United States in the event of a break in U.S.-Soviet ties.

Homer Boynton, executive assistant FBI director, said the FBI did not believe Mr. Herrmann ever passed classified information to the Soviet Union, but Mr. Boynton described him as "a big fish."

Colonel Herrmann said he received instructions by coded radio message. "I supplied information about the location of some people in the United States. I revealed many names [to the KGB]," he said. "I believe I supplied the information which could be called detrimental to the interest of the United States."

Colonel Herrmann is the highest-ranking illegal Soviet resident spy publicly identified since the arrest in 1957 of Col. Rudolf Abel, who was swapped back to the Soviet Union in 1962 in exchange for downed U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers.

Mr. Boynton declined to give a specific reason for Colonel Herrmann's appearance at a time when U.S.-Soviet ties are at a low because of the Soviet incursion into Afghanistan.

"We feel that it's important that the American public be aware of the type of espionage and intelligence activities that are occurring," he said.

He said the agency was at a crucial stage in resettling Colonel Herrmann, his wife and son, and that once he assumed a new identity as a private citizen it would be too late to make him available to reporters for questioning.

Administration sources, who declined to be identified, said that the decision to put Colonel Herrmann on display was cleared in advance by Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance. Colonel Herrmann's appearance follows by three days the disclosure by retiring FBI intelligence chief William Kregar that five communist diplomats had been quietly expelled from this country in the last year for spying.

Colonel Herrmann, who said he was about 45 years old, said that when the FBI apprehended him they offered him a choice of being prosecuted or cooperating. He said his arrest "was due to the blunder of my KGB contact."

Colonel Herrmann lived in Hartsdale, N.Y., outside New York City.

During an election year, he said, "I would study the results of all primaries, approach many of my neighbors, study every source about the true picture of how Americans felt about the candidates, to prepare for getting close to candidates, so that in case they won I could have somehow gotten a foot in the door."

He said the closest he got to a presidential candidate was a brief accidental discussion with one at the San Francisco airport while the candidate was talking with his aides. Colonel Herrmann refused to name the candidate because he said the man was never aware of his activities.

Aside from information on political candidates, he said he was badgered by the KGB to report on U.S. public views on U.S.-Soviet trade negotiations, the neutron bomb and detente.

Colonel Herrmann said he received instructions by radio from transmitters in the Soviet Union in a "foolproof" code. He said the instructions came every week, lasted from 5 to 30 minutes and were repeated three times. He said he sent his reports mostly in secret writing in letters to various addresses in Europe.

The FBI said he also traveled periodically to KGB headquarters in the Soviet Union for retraining and debriefing, the last of the trips coming in 1977.

The FBI said that on one of his first missions in the United States, the KGB radioed him the exact text of an anonymous letter he mailed from Atlanta to

U.S. authorities alleging that a manned space vehicle may have been sabotaged. Colonel Herrmann said he believed this was an Apollo spaceship, and the FBI said the ploy was unsuccessful.

Colonel Herrmann said he came to the West in 1958, entering West Germany as a refugee from East Germany. He stayed there until 1962, then spent six years in Canada before entering the United States as though he were a legal immigrant.

"From the first moment I got my immigration card, I strictly observed laws in the United States," he said. "I spent a lot of time figuring out my income taxes just to not make a mistake and to not get scrutinized."

Mr. Boynton said Colonel Herrmann's role as a double agent ended several months ago because of fear the KGB suspected he might be cooperating with U.S. agents.